

TRUTH & THE TRUE CHURCH

INTRO: Some time ago I gave a message called, "Truth & The Emergent Church." I am not able to keep up with all the ins and outs of the emergent church, but it seems to me that the view of truth is the crux of the whole matter. A man by name of Gary Gilley has written to expose some of the errors of the present church movements. He has just finished the third book. These books are titled after the nursery rhyme, "This Little Piggy." The first book he called, "This Little Church Went To Market." He pointed out the market driven methods used by the Church. The second book he called, "This Little Church Stayed Home." Here he spoke of the faithful church that had not wandered off the path. The last book he has just written is called, "This Little Church Had None." And he speaks of the church that no longer has truth. In a little article on his last book in the Berean Call, he mentioned 1 Timothy 3:15. That verse has come to my attention a number of times in the past while, and while I am still studying for a brief series of messages on the spirit world, I felt I should do a message on truth and the true Church. Some time ago I gave a message on truth and the emergent Church. Here is a passage that shows the relationship of the true Church to truth.

Let us read 1 Timothy 3:14-15 in that light. "These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, *I write* so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

The book of First Timothy, is the first of three epistles, called the Pastoral Epistles. These three books were written to Pastors, and so are called the pastoral epistles. And in these verses Paul says that he has written to Timothy in order that he might know how to conduct himself in the house of God. The 'House of God' is here further defined as the Church of the living God. Now the Church of the living God is that sum total of all believers of all the time of the Church age. This is the universal Church. And what held true for Timothy in the Church he was pastoring holds true for any local church at any time in the Church age.

In the OT, the 'House of God' referred to the temple. God dwelt in the Holy of Holies in that temple. When the Church

was born, believers became the 'House of God'. So our text says, that Paul wrote in order that Timothy might know how to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the Church of the living God." So Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3:16, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?" Every true believer is a part of the temple of God, and the Church as a whole is where God dwells on earth today. So Paul says in the very next verse, 1 Corinthians 3:17, "If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which *temple* you are."

So Paul has written to Timothy to instruct him, how he is to conduct himself in the house of God. Commentators seem to think that this refers not just the local church there, but the universal Church of the living God. So Barnes says, "This does not mean in a place of public worship, nor does it refer to propriety of deportment there. It refers rather to the church as a body of believers, and to intercourse with them. The church is called the 'house of God,' because it is that in which he dwells." Now note that it is the Church of the living God. This distinguishes Him from all other gods. There is only one living God.

What we want to zero in on this morning is that the house of God, which is the Church of the living God, which means all of us as believers, is the pillar and ground of the truth.

I. THE REALM OF TRUTH

Now the part of our verse we want to look at in particular is the part that says the Church of the living God is the pillar and ground of the truth. We want to first identify what realm of truth we are talking about. There are two kinds of revelation, two ways we can gather truth. These two ways are through general revelation and special revelation. General revelation reveals things that we can learn through the five senses from that which God created. There are many areas of truth in general revelation. There is scientific truth; mathematical truth; mechanical truth; agricultural truth and so on. This is a realm of truth available to all mankind. So you can go to what we would call a secular school, and learn mathematical facts, or electronic facts and so on.

You do not need to be a Christian to learn such truths.

Through general revelation one learns without question that there must be a God, or some power far beyond the power of humans. But one can study general revelation as long and as deeply as humanly possible, and still one will never learn such things as who the true God is; why we are here; why we have a tendency to do things we know are bad; why we feel guilty when we do wrong; what makes things wrong; what sin is; what sin does; why marriage is important; what will ultimately happen to everyone after death; what will ultimately happen to the universe; what makes us tick; what life is; what life is all about; what happens after death and many more such things. All the philosophies of history have never settled these questions.

If we are to learn anything of such things, we must have some divine revelation; some revelation from the One who created everything. That there is a Creator is self evident. But who this Creator is, and why He created everything and us and all the things we listed before must come by some divine revelation. Now, as Christians, this revelation we say God has given to us. It is the Bible. And the Bible reveals the truth as relates to the spiritual realm. These truths are not discernable through the five senses. Let me give you an example. That the universe has been created by a higher power is self evident without a need for aid from special revelation. It can be reasoned. All of creation sounds this out to us. But who the Creator was, this can only be known through special revelation. No human being was there when everything came into existence.

Now, the truth that relates to the spiritual nature of man is revealed to us, not in general revelation, but in the Bible, which we call special revelation. And without such truth, we are without God and without hope in this world. In the General Biblical Introduction course I have taught numerous times I say this, "Try to think of life for a moment, as to how it would be without the Bible. No divine direction in life. No personal relationship with God, as Paul describes us before salvation, "...having no

hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). That's how it was with the great Greek thinkers in the past. The following is a discussion of Socrates with some of his students regarding immortality. 'In the course of the conversation one of them, Simmias, made the following statement: 'I think a man's duty is one of two things: either to be taught or to find out where truth is, or if he cannot, at least to take the best possible human doctrine and the hardest to disprove, and to ride on this like a raft over the waters of life and take the risk; unless he could have a more seaworthy vessel to carry him more safely and with less danger, some divine doctrine [or, as Jowett translates it, 'some word of God'] to bring him through.'" (The Bible: The Living Word of Revelation pg 13).

Now consider that this man, who was in a secular sense a great thinker, recognized there was such a thing as spiritual truth, but he had no idea where to find it. What would it be like if you followed his advice? Well, one would always be changing to some new doctrine. Today, probably the hardest to refute doctrine would be the new age doctrine. Without the Bible, there is never anything consistent for any length of time. Go to our modern universities and you will find that out there. They are still arguing about what is good and what is bad, or if there is even such a thing. Think of pouring your life into the hardest to disprove doctrine, only to find in the end life you are still uncertain.

But when you come to the Bible, you not only find some book that is hard to disprove. Many who have tried to disprove the Bible have come away from their studies believers in the Bible as the Word of God. It is the Bible that gives us truth for the spiritual nature of man. It tells us Who the creator of the universe was, how long it took Him to make everything and in what order He created it all. It tells us why we have this nature that keeps drawing us towards sin. It tells us how to win the victory over that nature. It tells us all about ourselves. It tells us who we are. It not only tells us how everything came into being, but what will eventually happen and how it will be for eternity.

Today our very highly educated doctors know tons of truth regarding our bodies. They know so much and can do so much that it is absolutely unbelievable many times. It is unbelievable how they can remove organs from the body and replace them. It is amazing that they can remove the heart of a person and replace it with someone else's. On December 3, 1967, according to Wikipedia, the first heart transplant was done in South Africa. Today, over 35,000 transplants take place in one year. And with all that knowledge, they have no idea what makes the body tick and what is gone when the it ceases to tick. They do not know. These things belong to another realm, the spiritual realm; and they know nothing about that. But, because we have the Bible, we know.

So, from general revelation we learn all about the body and how the body functions and how to fix the body when things go wrong. But when the body dies, from general revelation we are at a loss as to what happened other than to say it is dead. We must dispose of it before it rots because it is dead. But from the Bible we learn the intricacies of the soul and the spirit. We know that when the body dies, the real person survives the body consciously and goes, either to heaven or to hell. We also know a lot of what such person's experience after death. These revelations are absolutely phenomenal, but we can only know them through divine revelation.

Listen to Psalm 119:97-100, "Oh, how I love Your law! It *is* my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; For they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, Because I keep Your precepts."

So tell me which revelation teaches which of the following:

- Math truths? General Revelation.
- Science truths, such as at what temperature water freezes? General Revelation.
- Truths regarding marriage? Divine Revelation.
- Agricultural truths? General Revelation.
- Salvation truths? Special revelation.

- Electricity truths? General revelation.
- What is right and what is wrong? Special Revelation.
- Geological truths? General revelation.
- Divorce and remarriage? Special Revelation.
- What will happen in the future? Special Revelation.

It is not usually hard to discern which area of truth we are talking about. And we note that the Church is not responsible to dispense mathematical truths or any other such truths available through general revelation. The church is responsible for spiritual truth. Today, when we question truth, it is generally with regard to spiritual truth. It is not normal to question such things as mathematical truths. It is spiritual truth that is under question. And spiritual truth has always, always been under ferocious attack, starting in the Garden of Eden.

And so, in our verse, when it says the Church is the pillar and ground of the truth, the truth in view is the truth that relates to the spiritual side of things. Now I want you to consider what this world would be like without spiritual truth. Tell me, if we had no spiritual truth, where would everybody go? If the Bible is correct, and we do not doubt that it is, then if there was no spiritual truth given to man we would all go to hell.

So God, because of His great love, determined to give to man all the spiritual truths needed for life and godliness. But, God had to choose someone to be responsible to record, preserve and disseminate that spiritual truth. And in the OT God chose the Jew to do that. With regard to the preservation and reproduction of the Word of God, the Jew did such an incredible job that Jesus Himself said that not one jot or one tittle would fail from the law until everything written therein was fulfilled (Matt. 5:18).

But, with regard to living and accurately teaching this Word, the Jews failed God. And when Jesus came to earth as the Jewish Messiah, the Jews, who wrote of Him before He came, failed to recognize Him and they had Him crucified by the Gentile powers then in control of their land. Three days later He was resurrected, and forty days after that, He ascended

to heaven, and another 10 days later the Church was born. And that Church became God's primary work on earth for the next 2,000 years. And let me just briefly stress what the Church is, for our text says the Church of the living God is the pillar and ground of truth. The Church is made up of all truly born again believers beginning from the day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2 until today, and until the rapture takes place. That body of believers is what the Bible calls the Church. It is that Church which Paul speaks to Timothy about in our text.

So, when it says the Church of the living God is the pillar and ground of the truth, the realm of truth we are talking about is that truth that relates to the spiritual nature of man. It is the special revelation God gave to man which we call the Bible.

II. THE PILLAR OF TRUTH ((Show artists reconstruction of this temple.)

So we want to consider our text then, the part that speaks of the Church of the living God being the pillar and ground of the truth. So let us consider first then, that the Church is the pillar of the truth. This letter was written to Timothy while he was pastoring the church in Ephesus (See 1:3). Listen to John MacArthur regarding the city of Ephesus and the terms 'pillar' and 'ground'. He writes, "The imagery of these terms for the church would not have been lost on the Ephesians. The impressive temple of the goddess Diana (Artemis), one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was located in the city. William Barclay gives the following description of it: 'One of its features was its pillars. It contained one hundred and twenty-seven pillars, every one of them the gift of a king. All were made of marble, and some were studded with jewels and overlaid with gold'" (*The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975], 89).

MacArthur then says, "Each **pillar** acted as a tribute to the king who donated it. The honorary significance of the pillars, however, was secondary to their function of holding up the immense structure of the roof:" (MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary - 1 Timothy).

So, here is the picture of Paul's metaphor. The roof is the truth. Under that is the pillar and the ground, picturing the Church. And so we want to consider first that our text says that the Church is the pillar of the truth. Now I think it must be clear to us that what the Scripture does not mean here is that the Church determines what is true and what is not. That is a doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. But it is not the Church that determines what truth is, it is the Word of God that does that.

How is it then that it says the Church is the pillar of truth? When it says the Church is the pillar of truth, I believe the pillar speaks of the Church as that entity through which God proclaims or disseminates the Word of God to the world. That task was entrusted by God to the Church. You see, just a few days before Jesus ascended, He said to His disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:19-20).

Then later, the day He ascended, after Jesus had led His disciples up the Mount of Olives, from where He would ascend into heaven, He said, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight" (Acts 1:8-9). If it had not been for the Church, how would we have ever become Christians? The Church is the pillar of truth.

John Calvin has said, "The reason why the Church is called the "pillar of truth" is, that she defends and spreads it by her agency. God does not himself come down from heaven to us, nor does he daily send angels to make known his truth; but he employs pastors, whom he has appointed for that purpose." Matthew Poole says the Church is the pillar of truth, and I quote, "because by it the truths of God are published, supported, and defended..."

If the true Church does not get the truth out, no one else is left that could do it. No one else can do it. The Church is the pillar of truth. It alone can accurately spread the Word. And I remind us that the Church is made up of believers, and though the propagation of the truth is especially up to pastors, it is also up to all believers. The universal Church is made up of all true believers. So, believers are the pillar of the truth, from Christians teaching their children Bible truths at home, to these truths being taught from the pulpit.

III. THE GROUND OF TRUTH

But our text goes on to say that the Church is the pillar and ground of the truth. What is meant by this additional word, 'ground' of truth? The question is, is it a further explanation of the word pillar, or is it a separate idea? I have come to the conclusion that it is a further idea. On top is the truth, and it rests on the pillar, and the pillar rests on the ground or foundation. If the pillar speaks of the propagation, the sending forth of the truth, what does this truth rest on? And I think we have the idea here of the Word of God. Certainly the Church is not the ground of truth in the sense that the Church determines what is true and what is not. But the Church determines from the Word of God what is true and what is not. I may be going out on a limb here a little but it is my conclusion that the Word of God is meant by the word 'ground' or 'foundation'. It is the Word of God which furnishes the ground of all special revelation.

In the first 70 years or so after Christ ascended to heaven, God entrusted the writing of the NT to believers, members of the universal Church. God did not entrust this incredible task to just anyone. He entrusted it to special members of the Church.

Then God entrusted the reproduction of the truth in His word to the Church. The church had the responsibility to reproduce the Word of God. This was an incredible task, especially before the printing press was invented. At various times in history, unsaved man tried to destroy the Word of God. Yet,

the Church was the ground on which the pillar of truth stood. The Church reproduced the Word of God. Christians hazarded their lives and even paid with their lives to reproduce the Word of God.

Further, God entrusted the safe guarding of the contents of the Bible to the Church. So in these past 2000 years of Church history, God has entrusted the safe guarding and reproduction and dissemination of the Bible to Christians. So, let me ask you, who kept the Word of God and reproduced it so that you and I might have a copy? The Church! Check history.

But, in spite of that, I fear that it is in the last 120 years or so we have failed to safe guard the Word of God by means of allowing many and various versions of the Bible to be made, and I fear that money has been the main tool used by the devil to get us there. It is possible that some of the earlier versions may have been done with good intent, but even they may have been motivated by false views which crept into the church through liberal scholars. I understand we now have versions that make the translation called The Message, which in my view is a translator's disaster, look like a conservative work. For those who are interested, we have two messages on the Living Hope site on sermonaudio that deal with Bible versions. Many versions today, I fear, are a threat to the truth which God has entrusted to the Church to preserve.

But, not only did God entrust the reproduction of His Word to the Church but God entrusted the correct interpretation of this word to the Church. God has entrusted the accurate preaching and teaching of the truth to the Church. From parents who read the Bible to their children to pastors in the pulpit. This fall we plan to begin pastor elections. Here is a word to those who will be pastors in the future.

Let us consider for a moment, what today is called the emergent church. The emergent church is at this point uncertain if homosexuality is in fact wrong. What does that mean? It means that it is not sure that the Bible is truly God's special revelation and therefore, by our text alone, the emergent church can no longer be part of the true Church, for the true

Church is the pillar and ground of truth. The true Church would not question such obvious matters.

You see, if it were not for the Church, the truth would have been without pillar or foundation for the last 2,000 years. It is a huge task God has entrusted to the Church. It is a huge task God has entrusted to us, as believers. It is our responsibility to hold forth the truth of the Word of God, to see that it is accurately translated, taught and practiced. And if we, the Church, do not do so, there is no one else to whom God has entrusted this very important work. In this age, only the true Church can be the pillar and ground of the truth.

CONCL: So, in conclusion, in my view, the Church is the pillar of the truth in that God has entrusted to it the task of evangelism, the task of making it known in the world. Then God has entrusted to the Church the responsibility to safe guard the words of the Word of God. When the copies of the Scriptures are no longer accurate, as is the case in many of our modern versions, then the very foundation of truth has been undermined.

I have good news for you though, out of all this. The text says the Church is the pillar and foundation of the truth. It is that. This is talking about the universal Church. Now there are those who claim to be part of the church. They call themselves a church. But they no longer proclaim the truth of the Word and they are not concerned about keeping the Word of God pure. So if they are a church that does not subscribe to truth as taught in the word of God, neither are they truly part of the universal Church. The universal Church, those who truly stand for the truth, these make up the true Church; and this Church is the pillar and foundation of the truth.